

XI. *The Description of an Antique Metal Stamp, in the Collection of his Grace CHARLES Duke of Richmond, Lenox and Aubigny, F. R. S. &c. being one of the Instances, how near the Romans had arrived to the Art of Printing; with some Remarks by C. Mortimer, M. D. Fellow of the College of Physicians, and Secr. R. S. Lond.*

SINCE Arts and Sciences, especially Statuary and Sculpture, were arrived at so great Perfection, when the *Roman Empire* was in its Glory, as the many beautiful Statues, the exquisite *Intaglia's*, and fine Medals, which Time hath handed down to us, do sufficiently evince; it is much to be wonder'd at, that they never hit upon the Method of printing Books.

The Dies they made for their Coins, and their stamping them on the Metal, was in reality Printing on Metal; their Seals cut in Cornelians and Agates, and their pressing them on Dough and soft Wax, was another sort of Printing; and a third sort was the marking their earthen Vessels, while the Clay was soft, with the Name of the Potter, or the Owner the Vessel was made for. These being of a larger Size, were

were properly called *Signa*; the Seals cut in Stone were called *Sigilla*; *Sigillum* being a Diminutive of *Signum*, as *Tigillum* is of *Tignum*: But the later and more barbarous *Latinists* have form'd the Diminutive of *Signum* into *Signetum*; and if a very small Pocket-Seal, they have called it *Signaculum*. See *Joh. Mich. Heinecius de Sigillis. Francof. 1709. Fol. p. 16. & seq.*

The learned *Montfaucon*, amongst his prodigious Treasures of Antiquities, in his *Antiquité expliquée*, Tom. III. Partie 2^{de}. Chap. 12. gives us the Figures and Descriptions of several of these larger *Sigilla* or *Signa*, whereon, he saith, the Names were all cut in hollow in capital Letters, *Domini Patronique nomen majusculis literis insculptum*, which he expresses in French, *imprimé en creux*; and he imagines their Use to have been to mark earthen Vessels, particularly those great earthen Jars, wherein the *Romans* used to keep their Wines. If any of them had occurr'd to him with the Letters *excisæ*, *exsculptæ*, protuberant or standing out, as the Types in our modern way of Printing are made, so accurate a Describer of Antiquities could not have passed such an one over without having mention'd it, and that the rather because of its being a greater Rarity: tho' several Lamps of *Terra cocta* are stamp'd with Letters impressed or hollow, from such protuberant Letters as in this Stamp, but the greater Number have the Letters raised, or standing out.

You have here the Impression and Figure of one of these last sort of Stamps *, whereon the Letters are *exsculptæ* or protuberant, as is likewise the Edge or Border round the whole Stamp.

This

* The Impression at p. 388. is from the very Stamp itself, and the Figure of the Stamp is represented in the TAB. prefixed.

This Stamp is made of the true antient Brass, and is cover'd over with a green Scale or Coat, such as is usually seen on antient Medals. It was found in or near *Rome*. On the Back is fasten'd a Ring, whereof the Hole is $\frac{2}{4}\frac{7}{10}$ of an *English* Inch one way, and $\frac{2}{4}\frac{3}{10}$ the other way; the Plate itself is two Inches long, wanting $\frac{1}{4}\frac{1}{10}$, and its Breadth exactly $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{5}$ of an Inch: The Sides are parallel to one another, and the Ends are likewise parallel to each other, but they are not upon an exact Square with the Sides, varying about one Degree and an half from an exact Rectangle. On the under Side stand two Lines or Rows of Letters $\frac{7}{10}$ of an Inch in Height, and well-form'd *Roman Capitals*: The Faces of them stand up all upon an exact Level with one another, and with the Edge or Border of the Stamp; their Protuberance or Height above the Ground is different, the Ground being cut uneven; for close to most of the Letters the Ground is cut away only $\frac{2}{4}\frac{2}{5}$, close to some near $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{5}$, and close to the Edges full $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{5}$. The first Line contains these Letters, CICAECILI, with a Stop or Leaf to fill up the Line; in the second Line, HERMIAE.SN. Which I judge is to be read *Caii Julii Cæcili, Hermiæ Signum.* Who this *Caius Julius Cæcilius* was, I cannot find, he being probably a Man in a private Station, and so his Name hath not been handed down to us in any Monuments, but only accidentally in this Stamp. In *Gruter* occur two of the Name of *Hermias*, and several of the *Cæcili*, but none with these two Names joined together.

The Use of this Stamp seems to have been for the Signature of the above-mention'd private Man, to save him the Trouble of writing his Name, as some

some People have now-a-days. It was certainly used on Paper or Membranes, being first dipt into Ink, or some sort of Paint, because of the Protuberance of the Letters, the hollow Letters being fitter for soft Substances, on which they leave the Impression standing up, and consequently more legible. Another Argument to me, that this Stamp was not to be used on any soft Substance into which it might be pressed quite down to the Ground, is the Unevenness and Roughness with which the Ground is finish'd, which, was it to have made part of the Impression, the Workman would have finish'd with more Accuracy; but he, knowing that the Surface of the Letters was to perform the whole Work requir'd, was only attentive to finish them with that accurate Evenness that these have.

The learned Mr. *Mattaire*, in his *Annales Typographici*, *Hagæ* 1719. in 4^o. p. 4. concludes from the best Authors, that our modern Art of Printing was first thought of about the Year 1440. A Copy of the Book he mentions, *ib. p. 13.* called *Speculum nostræ Salutis*, being Pictures of Stories out of the Bible, with Verses underneath, in *Dutch*, I have seen in the *Stad-house* at *Harlem*. Each Page was printed from a Block of Wood, like a sorry wooden Cut; and this was the first Essay of Printing, which Hint was taken from Engraving, and is what he means p. 4. by *Typi fixi*; after which they soon improv'd to use separate Types, as we now do, which he terms, *ibid. Typi mobiles*. This Stamp is, in Reality, a small Frame of fixt Types, and prints with our modern Printer's Ink, which is only a sort of black Paint, as readily as any Set of Letters, cut

in the rude manner these are, can be expected to perform: I have therefore exhibited the Impression of it, at the Head of this Paper, as the most antient Sample of Printing we know of; for by the Appearance of the Metal it seems to be of the Upper Empire.

We see by this Stamp of two Lines, that the very Essence of Printing was known to the *Romans*, and they had nothing to do but to have made a Stamp with Lines three or four times as long, and containing twenty instead of two Lines, to have form'd a Frame of Types that would have printed a whole Page, as well as *Coster's* wooden Blocks, which he used in printing the *Speculum Salutis*.

In the first Volume of a Collection of several Pieces of Mr. *John Toland*, printed *Lond.* 1726. in 8^o. p. 297. is a small Tract of his intituled, *Conjectura verosimilis de prima Typographiæ Inventione*, which is founded upon the following Passage in *Ciceron*, in cap. 20. Lib. II. *de Natura Deorum*; where *Balbus* the *Stoic* uses the following Words in an Argument against *Velleius* an *Epicurean*:

Hic ego non mirer esse aliquem, qui sibi persuadeat, corpora quædam solida atque individua vi & gravitate ferri; mundumque effici ornatissimum & pulcherrimum, ex eorum concursione fortuita? Hoc qui existimet fieri potuisse, non intelligo cur non idem putet, si innumerabiles unius & viginti formæ literarum (vel aureæ vel quales libet) aliquo conjiciantur; posse ex his in terram excussis annales Ennii, ut deinceps legi possint, effici; quod nescioanne in uno quidem versu possit tantum valere fortuna.

He conjectures that this very Passage gave the first Hint to the Inventors of Printing about the Year 1445. because they retain'd even *Cicero's* Name for their Types, calling them *Formæ Literarum*, and made them of Metal, as he says, *aureæ vel quales libet*. Moreover, in *Cap. 10. Lib. III. de Divinatione*, *Cicero* hath the very Phrase *imprimere literas*.

Brands for marking Cattle were in Use in *Virgil's* Time, *Georg. Lib. III. ver. 158.* where he says,

Continuoque notas, & nomina gentis inurunt.

Procopius, in his *Historia Arcana*, says, the Emperor *Justinus*, not being able to write his Name, had a thin smooth Piece of Board, through which were cut Holes in form of the four Letters **I V S T**. which, laid on the Paper, serv'd to direct the Point of his Pen; which being dipt in red Ink, and put in his Hand, his Hand was guided by another. Possibly this may likewise have given the Hint to the first of our Card-makers, who paint their Cards in the same manner, by Plates of Pewter or Copper, or only Pasteboards, with Slits in them in form of the Figures that are to be painted on the Cards.

Fig. 1.

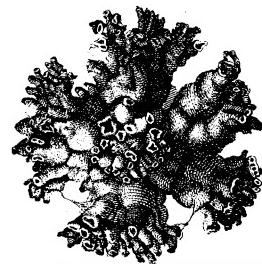


Fig. 2.

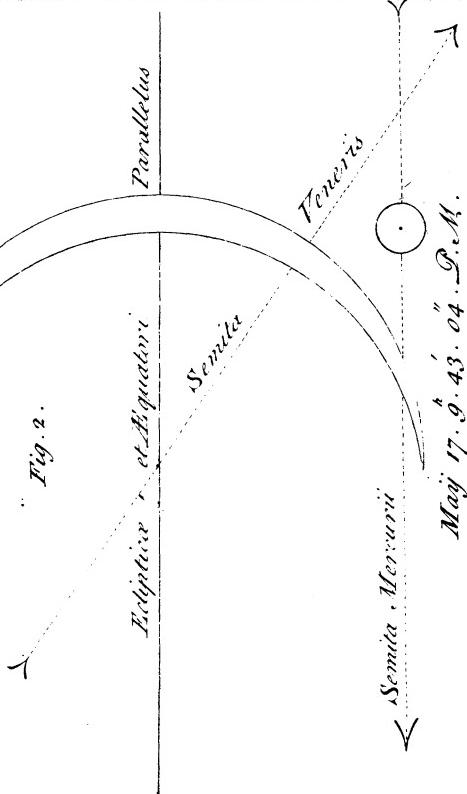


Fig. 4.

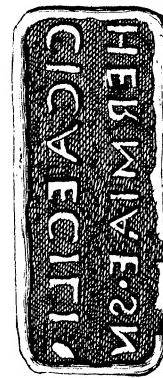


Fig. 3.

